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SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL APPROACHES TO LEISURE

By the end of this chapter, you should:

- be familiar with a number of social theories and how they have been applied within a leisure context
- have an understanding of the nature of leisure constraint developed within these social theories
- have a critical understanding of the barriers to leisure participation
- understand the nature of social division
- comprehend and question the role of social class, and gender, as potential barriers to leisure participation
- have a critical understanding of the theory and research in the area.

Introduction

A wide range of social theories have been used to develop our understanding of the leisure experience and of the role of leisure in the wider society. In this chapter, we will examine those perspectives that have been most commonly used to aid our understanding. Firstly, the Functionalist perspective argues that individual people perform roles within a social system and that these social roles interact with each other to form social systems. Leisure institutions have a role to play both for individual people and for maintaining the social system as a whole. We shall contrast this view with the Marxian and neo-Marxian perspectives that suggest capitalism shapes the nature of work and leisure and developed leisure as a form of consumption. Leisure choices are restricted by our income and working-class people exercise little control over the social allocation of those resources. The chapter will also address the Feminist approaches to leisure, including an evaluation of why many leisure activities were assumed to be inappropriate for women. The suggestion of both the Marxian perspectives and the Feminist perspectives is that leisure reflects social divisions that are ultimately rooted outside leisure experience itself. The

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Interactionist perspective will also be explored. Kelly (1983) argues that the basis of social solidarity is found in social interaction around the leisure experience. Leisure contributes to social identification and cohesion. Leisure is the social space of friendship, parenting, community interaction and the family. In the late 1990s, it became fashionable to discuss the leisure experience in terms of its *plasticity* – leisure had become ‘decentred’; it was no longer separated from our other experiences. Leisure is central to the way people choose to construct their identity and was central to an emerging life politics, a politics of individual self-realisation.

The Functionalist Approach

From a functionalist perspective, leisure has a number of roles or functions to perform for the wider social system, including helping to bridge the gap between the individual and the wider social system. National sporting events in particular have a role to play in bringing about greater social integration. The reader might reflect on the purpose of opening and closing ceremonies, uniforms, medal and award ceremonies, and shaking hands with opponents at the end of a game.

Functionalism

Functionalism is a perspective within the social sciences that argues that individual people perform roles within a social system. These social roles interact with each other to form social systems. Within social systems, there are institutions that perform functions for both individuals and for the social system as a whole. Finally, the social system is underpinned by a set of common values. Leisure institutions have a role to play both for individual people and for the social system as a whole.

Talcott Parsons: A Functionalist Approach to Social Systems

For Talcott Parsons (1951), there are two essential reference points for the analysis of social systems:

- the categorising of functional requirements of a social system
- the categorising of the cybernetic hierarchy within a social system – in other words, an analysis of the processes of control within the social system.

The starting point for Parson’s functionalist analysis is the *action frame of reference* – the social actions and interactions of individual people that make up

the social system. Individual people developed a strategy of responses based upon a range of possible expectations about a given situation.

As a functionalist, Parsons believed that the social system had to overcome four basic problems:

- adaptation – dealt with by the economy
- goal attainment – dealt with by the political system
- pattern maintenance/tension management – dealt with by the family
- integration – dealt with by a range of leisure and cultural organisations.

Underpinning the social system was a ‘common value system’. In a *simple* society, Parsons describes the common value system as characterised by Pattern Variables A, whilst in a complex society the common value system is characterised by Pattern Variables B.

- Functionalism undervalues the human agent – in other words, it is assumed that individual people have very little free will or individual control over what happens in their lives – forces outside of their control push them about.
- Functionalism is often assumed to be a perspective that is politically conservative in nature.

Kenneth Roberts (1999) argues that the functions of leisure are to:

- consolidate the social system
- act as a safety valve for the wider social system by easing stresses and strains
- imprint values such as leadership, teamwork and fair play
- provide people with an opportunity to develop their skills
- help to compensate for the unrewarding and unsatisfying aspects of life.

For Roberts (1999) leisure choices are as free as can be expected. In contrast to the Marxian and Feminist approaches, the Pluralist approach rejects class as a significant factor in shaping leisure participation. Rather, pluralists accept the capitalist economic framework, especially the notion that the consumer is sovereign and should be free to pursue their own interests. Companies try to make money from leisure, but only if they provide what the public want to buy. Leisure pursuits come and go because of the changing nature of consumer demand.

If the state does intervene in leisure provision, this is only to police the leisure market and to increase choice rather than restrict it, by preserving areas of natural beauty or promoting public welfare via the provision of public parks, swimming pools and libraries and theatres, or through bodies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Arts Council or Sport England, all of which help to reduce exclusion from leisure spaces.

For Roberts (1999), if publicly funded leisure and sports provision were not available, then many economically disadvantaged people, including children, would have very limited recreational opportunities.

A Functionalist Approach to Work and Leisure – Stanley Parker

Taking his point of departure from Harold Wilensky's concepts of 'spillover' (where leisure time activities are a continuation of work-related activities) and 'compensation' (leisure is used to make up for the dissatisfaction experienced during work time), Stanley Parker provides a functionalist account of the link between work and leisure. However, Parker is critical of earlier functionalist accounts in the area, such as that of Edward Gross (1961). For Gross, work is defined in terms of 'free' time; moreover, work gives a person the *right* to leisure. Work is instrumental and compulsory; leisure is expressive and voluntary; both work and leisure have a role to play in the maintenance of culture and socialisation into cultural traditions – learning rules of behaviour, what is acceptable what is not, fair play, etc. A range of skills are also acquired through work and leisure that are important for the maintenance of the social system.

Gross emphasised that leisure has important *tension management* functions to perform, allowing individuals to restore their sense of self after the stressful experience of work. The social system's *adaptation* functions are also serviced by leisure, in that leisure provides people with opportunities for joining voluntary associations in their non-work time that help to maintain 'instrumental values'.

Leisure has in the past provided examples of national symbols and has been used to identify skills and abilities that people have. Gross argues that this gives leisure an important role to play in the area of *goal attainment*. Leisure also provides opportunities for individuals to involve themselves in group activities that help to maintain group solidarity – an important integration function for any social system.

Parker (1976) argues that Gross's analysis is little more than an artificial attempt to put leisure behaviour into four boxed categories that add little to our understanding of the link between work and leisure.

Stanley Parker (1976) looked at the relationship between work and leisure in terms of two concepts:

- *Fusion* – where we refuse to view work and leisure as distinct parts of our lives.
- *Polarity* – where we insist on work and leisure as distinct parts of our lives.

The nature of employment may directly affect what people choose to do in their non-work time or leisure time. Stanley Parker outlined three distinct patterns of leisure that have developed as a reaction to the experiences people

have at work. These three patterns are based upon the assumption that the activities people engage in during their work time may directly affect their non-work time or leisure time:

- Firstly, there is a group of people who continue their working life into their leisure hours – the *extension* pattern. Parker describes such people as ‘stretched’ by their work and he gives the examples of successful business people, doctors, teachers and social workers.
- Secondly, there is a group of people who develop leisure patterns that are clearly in opposition to their work – the *opposition* pattern. Parker gives the examples of miners and oilrig workers. Parker describes such people as ‘damaged’ by their work.
- Thirdly, there is a group of people who display neutrality about the type of leisure activity they are involved in – leisure may be separate from work but this may not be planned to be so – the *neutrality* pattern. Parker gives the examples of occupations that are neither fulfilling nor oppressive and he describes such people as ‘passive’, ‘uninvolved’ and often ‘bored’ by their work.

By way of criticism, we could argue that Parker provides little or no justification or evidence for the occupations that he cites as belonging to each category. In addition, he assumes that people’s leisure time activities are determined by their work activities, irrespective of the level of personal choice or personal involvement. In other words, assuming that all miners and oilrig workers have leisure patterns that stand in opposition to their work, Parker falls into the functionalist trap described above, of undervaluing the role of the human agent in making personal leisure choices. In addition, Parker does not take into account that our individual choices may be rooted in individual pleasure and desire and not determined by the type of paid work we do.

The Marxian Approach

From the Marxian perspective, if a group of people own the means of production, they not only have economic power, they also have political power. The state is viewed as an institution that helps to organise capitalist society in the best interests of the bourgeoisie (the ruling class). Many working-class people maintain the legitimacy of the system because they are seen as victims of a false consciousness. In other words, working-class people are said to hold values, ideas and beliefs about the nature of inequality, which are not in their own economic interests to hold. Working-class people have their ideas manipulated by the media, schools and religion, for example, and regard economic inequality as fair and just.

What does Marx understand by the term class relations? For Marx, capitalist society is a form of society in which factories, shops and offices are privately owned, rather than owned by the government. Within capitalism, there are a

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number of economic classes, but Marx investigates two: the Bourgeoisie, who own the means of production and the Proletariat, who do not. These two groups have a structural conflict of interest. In order to make profits, the bourgeoisie must exploit the proletariat, whilst to improve their own living standards, the proletariat must reduce the profits of the bourgeoisie by transferring more profit to the workers as wages.

The theory that Marx develops to explain class exploitation is called 'the labour theory of value'. According to Marx, because the bourgeoisie buy the materials of production from other capitalists, who have a rational perception of their situation, these materials are bought at their true market value, hence the source of profit for Marx can only come from exploiting labour power. It is extracting surplus value from the labour force that provides the difference between the amount of money it takes to set up the production process and the amount of money made at the end of the production process. In addition, we should note that surplus value is not simply profit, it also includes the cost of setting up the production process again for the next production run.

For Marxists, the dominant ideas of any historical period are the ideas of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. The notion of a 'dominant ideology' refers to a system of thought that is manipulated by the bourgeoisie and imposed upon the proletariat in support of capitalism. The Marxian conception of ideology is based upon a humanistic notion that consent should be based upon an authentic consciousness free from any distortion. For Marxists, the term ideology suggests that the bourgeoisie do something to the way in which working-class people think about the world. The bourgeoisie create a 'worldview' for the proletariat, which is shaped via the mass media, the education system and organised religion, together with other institutions that are concerned with ideas. Class interests shape ideas and the bourgeoisie distort the ideas of the proletariat by imposing 'false consciousnesses' upon them. Television manipulating the ideas of individual people is an often-considered example. Working-class people make use of their false consciousness to justify their own subordination within the capitalist system.

However, the Marxian analysis of ideology contains a very simplistic view of 'representation'. Representation is concerned with how something we see or hear reminds us of something else, for example a heart shape may remind a person of love and romance, or a smile may be a representation of happiness. These are issues of 'cognition', where something happens inside our brain – the process of cognition – which suggests that we think about a person, place or thing when a representation of it presents itself to us. In the Marxian analysis of ideology, this is because working-class people have their ideas manipulated. This means that the bourgeoisie are able to redefine how objects, ideas and beliefs have meaning for us. The bourgeoisie are said to be capable of taking any object, idea or belief and substituting a new representation within our consciousness, and this new representation is supportive of capitalism, against our own interests, and legitimises both the position of the bourgeoisie and the exploitation of the working class.

Marx never developed a research interest in relation to leisure and it was not until the 1980s that the Marxian perspective took a serious interest in the role of leisure in capitalist society.

The neo-Marxian Approach to Leisure

In the mid 1980s, John Clarke and Chas Critcher (1985) developed an approach to the commercialisation of leisure that was strongly influenced by the work of Marx and later Marxian thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci. Clarke and Critcher argue that capitalism shapes the nature of work and leisure. Before the Industrial Revolution, there was no clear dividing line between these two areas of life. The Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism had two main effects: firstly, capitalism removed opportunities for leisure, leading to a clear demarcation between work and leisure. Secondly, the state and capitalist enterprise became the key influences of leisure. Central to this was the role of the state in licensing certain leisure activities: pubs, casinos, betting shops; films and DVDs are also cleared for release. In addition, by the use of health and safety legislation, the state also regulated what can be consumed.

Antonio Gramsci and hegemony

Antonio Gramsci rejected the economic determinism contained within traditional Marxian approaches. Writing from his prison cell in the 1930s, Gramsci (1977) made a distinction between two parts of the state:

One part of the state he named political society, which contained all the repressive state institutions, such as the police and the army; the second part of the state he named civil society and this referred to the part of the state that contained the institutions, such as the mass media, that attempted to manipulate our ideas.

The state maintains order by generating consent amongst working-class people – although the state has the ability to use force if necessary to maintain the social order, it would always prefer to produce a compromise. The state attempts to form a historic bloc, which involves making compromises with different groups, in an effort to maintain solidarity. Consent is maintained by hegemony, a body of ideas, which becomes part of our consciousness and which we accept as right. For Gramsci, only by challenging and reformulating hegemony and establishing a new historic bloc can working-class people cause the downfall of capitalism.

Clarke and Critcher (1985) were also highly critical of the functionalist approach to leisure – they argue that for the functionalist, leisure is the site of desirable experiences: freedom, choice, the fulfilment of needs, self-actualisation

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and self-expression. Leisure is assumed to reflect the life of individuals who have satisfied their basic biological needs for food, clothing and shelter. However, the functionalist approach ignores the fact that leisure remains the compensation that has to be earned through paid work in capitalist enterprises.

Clarke and Critcher (1985) are critical of the link between work and leisure in Stanley Parker's work – they argue that his model:

- is suggestive and not based upon any systematic data collection
- relies upon a weak functionalist analysis
- assumes that any social pattern/activity can be explained by identifying the function it performs for the wider social system
- assumes that leisure is a function of the work experience
- gives little attention to human agency
- assumed that social behaviour is a cultural reflex
- is not comprehensive, and ignores the leisure of women with children.

There has been a long-running concern about the dangers of leisure and the creation of a leisure society. Free time is open to abuse. There are a number of concerns about the danger of leisure, mainly in relation to excess and misuse. Hence, the state has to license and regulate. Clarke and Critcher (1985) argue that under the guise of maintaining public order, the state attempts to impose a form of socially acceptable leisure activity. Solutions to the problem of working-class leisure take three forms:

- 'off the streets'
- 'under supervision'
- 'something constructive to do'.

One of the central institutions for the imposition of acceptable leisure is education. For Clarke and Critcher, traditional 'arts' education such as Fine Art or English Literature assists young people's understanding and appreciation of the country's rich cultural heritage and helps to develop young people's civilising faculties. They also develop the argument that the state encourages a form of rational domesticity among working-class women.

Leisure is becoming subjected to increasing *capitalisation*, losing its elements of freedom and choice and becoming more like paid work. The class structure determines the shape of both employment and leisure activities.

The market and state have constructed leisure; control the supply and created leisure as a form of consumption. This creation of the leisure consumer was the product of social processes. The commercial sector was allowed to become dominant; even in the state sector, distribution of resources was always via a commercial model. Acceptance of the rhetoric of consumer sovereignty is also used to conceal power relationships.

For Clarke and Critcher, contemporary leisure can usefully be understood in terms of class, even though the class structure may be changing and the working class is diminishing in both size and influence. Clarke and Critcher argue that leisure choices are based upon access to resources that are unequally distributed and therefore our leisure is materially and culturally constrained by class divisions. Our leisure choices are restricted by our income and working-class people exercise little control over the social allocation of those resources.

With the rise of rational recreation in the nineteenth century, working-class people had their use of public space curtailed. Middle-class people viewed the street as a thoroughfare and put pressure on the state to discourage the informal use of public space for working-class social interaction: doorstep banter and other types of gossip may be fine but children playing, teenagers hanging about, the maintenance of cars and skateboarding are all potentially disruptive to public space. Even today, shopping centres are patrolled to control working-class behaviour in such public spaces.

Clarke and Critcher argue that there are three possible relations between the individual citizen and a cultural institution:

- a *member* with an active commitment to the institution
- a *customer* who has a relationship based upon a service contract
- a *consumer* who is a person with neither a commitment nor a formal contract.

For Clarke and Critcher, large corporations have the power to influence consumers' needs. The leisure industry creates new products and then tries to persuade consumers that they should purchase them. As such, patterns of leisure participation are not the outcome of individual choice, as suggested by Roberts's pluralist/consumer model. In addition, leisure is also organised around a number of subcultures rooted within social divisions in relation to class, race, age and gender – leisure opportunities are always unequally structured in both a material and a cultural sense:

- Material resources include time and money.
- Cultural resources include the perception of what is appropriate leisure behaviour for a member of a particular social group.

The class analysis within Clarke and Critcher's work is based upon a three-class model: upper class, middle class and working class.

The upper class is numerically small but powerful. Leisure style is central to who they perceive themselves to be. Gentlemen's clubs, West End theatres, royal garden parties, and places like Ascot, Henley and St Moritz are all important in defining the class boundary. This approach is fine but is a significant departure from the traditional Marxian approach. Clarke and Critcher depart significantly from the central concepts and ideas of the Classical Marxian tradition; in particular, they ignore the labour theory of value in their analysis and have

a much greater emphasis on consumption within the process of class formation rather than production. Leisure style, class and social status become indistinguishable in Clarke and Critcher's analysis. Without the labour theory of value, class can become very difficult to define.

The middle class is also difficult to define because of the unclear class boundary. Compared to the working class, the greater income of middle-class people gives them more open access to the leisure market. The middle class is more likely to participate in 'private' leisure activities, such as gardening and DIY house maintenance, and more likely to frequent 'public' leisure venues such as theatres and restaurants. The middle-class leisure participation is seemingly more individualistic in nature and often involves participation in voluntary and charitable work.

Leisure participation is central to the maintenance of cultural inequalities. Going out for a meal may be common to all classes, but there are crucial differences in the sorts of food and choice of restaurants. For the working class, playing sport and club membership are as common as they are amongst middle class people, although again there are significant cultural differentials, for example membership of a private golf club is different from belonging to a pub football team.

Clarke and Critcher discuss social divisions other than class, for example age, that have an impact on the kinds of leisure activity people get involved in. They dismiss the role of personal interest, biological factors and physical ability as factors that restrict leisure participation. Rather, they argue that it is what activities are perceived as appropriate for older people to be seen participating in that is significant. Clarke and Critcher suggest that age is a social construction imposed upon individuals and as a consequence age becomes a socially imposed leisure constraint.

Clarke and Critcher conclude by arguing that leisure reflects social divisions that are ultimately rooted outside leisure experience itself. Leisure 'realises' social divisions – becoming one of the powerful means by which social divisions receive expression and validation. Moreover, in contrast to the pluralist position that Roberts adopts, for Clarke and Critcher, leisure is far more a restricted activity. However, the Marxian assumptions that Clarke and Critcher's analysis rests on are not adequate to develop such an argument about the social construction of age, gender and sexuality as barriers to leisure participation.

Feminist Approaches to Leisure

Within Leisure Studies, there is a huge feminist literature that draws upon a range of different social, political and philosophical traditions: radical feminism, socialist feminism, post-feminism, post-modernist feminism. Although feminism is not a unified perspective or set of ideas, there are some shared meanings and assumptions, in relation to what we understand by the concepts

of 'female' and 'male'. The concept of patriarchy is widely used amongst feminists and is both a description of and a theoretical explanation for the social position of women. The terms sex and sexuality are more problematic. 'Sex' is an activity, a classification of a person, a desire, a descriptor of anatomy, and a source of pleasure and fantasy. For most radical feminists, 'sex' is treated as a 'given' and the notion of patriarchy has the status of a universal truth. In recent years, the category of *woman* has become problematic. What is it that constitutes the category of *woman*? It is not something that we can simply assume; this criticism came initially from 'black' feminists who were unable to develop any form of sisterhood with 'white' feminists. If there is no foundation, then the category of *woman* is of little value to us. In Judith Butler's work, she argues that gender is 'performative' rather than fixed.

Activity

For the term "patriarchal" implies a model of power as interpersonal domination, a model where all men have forms of literal, legal and political power over all women. Yet many of the aspects of women's oppression are constructed diffusely, in representational practices, in forms of speech, in sexual practices. (Coward, 1983: 272)

What does it mean to be a *woman*? Share your answer with fellow students and identify any similarities and differences between the responses of males and females.

Many radical feminists argue that women have a distinct epistemology (theory of knowledge) and ontology (theory of what constitutes reality), as women have knowledge that men could not possess and women think in different from men ways.

For Walby (1998), patriarchy needs to be conceptualised at different levels of abstraction – we need to recognise that it can take different forms and that it need not be a universalistic notion which is true in one form at all times and in all places. Drawing upon the processes found in Giddens' theory of structuration, Walby attempts to construct a more flexible model of patriarchy which can either be in a 'public' or 'private' form, and constructed out of six partially interdependent structures which have different levels of importance for different women at different times and places, rather than a simple universal base-superstructure model.

At its most abstract level, patriarchy exists as a system of social relations, built upon the assumptions that whenever a man comes into contact with a woman he will attempt to oppress her. The second level of patriarchy is organised around six patriarchal structures: the patriarchal mode of production; patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal relations in the state; male

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violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, such as religion, the media and education.

Patriarchy is not universal – it can take different forms and is dependent upon a range of structures. If one structure of patriarchal relations is challenged and becomes ineffective, another can easily replace it. Patriarchal relations are not simply *given*, they are created by individual people as a *medium* and an *outcome* of the practices of their everyday lives. Men draw upon the structures of patriarchy in order to empower themselves and make their social actions more likely to be effective. By doing so, men reinforce these very patriarchal structures, hence Walby's argument that patriarchal relations are not simply *given* – they are created by individual people as an outcome of the practices that make up their everyday lives. The structures of patriarchy are in constant flux as they are drawn upon by men, reinvented, reinforced and recreated.

Walby's argument opens up the idea that all sociological notions of what constitutes 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are socially constructed. However, if our notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are socially constructed, not only can they be constructed differently, but they can be deconstructed out of existence.

Many feminists see patriarchy as a significant barrier to female participation in a range of leisure activities. Many leisure activities are assumed to be inappropriate for women. Similarly, patriarchy prescribes many activities as suitable for men; leisure activities often provide a site in which men have to continually demonstrate their masculinity.

An Interactive Approach: John R. Kelly

For John R. Kelly, leisure roles are related to, but are not determined by, the economy, the family and the community. Traditional definitions of leisure insist that leisure is 'doing something', in the sense of being a chosen activity rather than a state of mind.

However, for Kelly, the economy, family and community are distinct dimensions of our lives, within which we perform a range of social roles that have a differing degree of obligation, fun and interest.

The Interactionist Approach

Interactionism has its origins in the work of a diverse group of theorists and researchers at the University of Chicago between 1890 and 1940. In essence, we understand social action because it is symbolic and reciprocal in nature. Social actions are human behaviours that have an intention behind them – we as members of a society can read and understand the meaning of behaviours that we observe.

For Herbert Blumer (1962), what is distinctive about human relationships is our ability to construct and share our social worlds. Blumer argues that the

term 'symbolic interaction' refers to the unique character of interaction that takes place between humans. Human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions and do not merely react to the actions of others, and our 'response' is based on the meaning that we assign to the actions we observe. Human interaction always involves an interpretation of symbols that carry meaning. Blumer assumes that:

- society is a framework within which interaction takes place, but society does not determine social action
- social change is a product of interpretation, not brought about by factors outside of the person.

From Blumer's perspective, no factors can influence social action, outside of this process of self-indication. Only interpretation precedes the act. This approach stands in sharp contrast to Marxism and functionalism – in these perspectives, claims Blumer, human behaviour is seen to be a product of stimulus-response variables such as social class. In both these approaches, the actions of the individuals who make up human society are simply the product of wider social forces, and the individual's personal motives and intentions in relation to leisure choices or any activity are ignored by the analysis.

The field of Leisure Studies is based upon the assumption that the leisure experience is qualifiedly different from other experiences in social life. For Kelly and Kelly (1994), the distinctiveness of leisure is to be found in the 'dimension or quality of action', rather than in terms of leisure as a 'separate domain'. Kelly and Kelly (1994) reject any form of 'artificial segregation' of leisure and instead develop a life-course framework for attempting to identify continuities and changes in roles associated with the leisure experience. They argue in favour of a *life-course framework*, an approach that provides a useful point of view because it combines the ways in which people choose to shape their own self-definition but within changing contexts of their other intersecting social roles and responsibilities.

This means that if an individual has a strong commitment to their paid employment, this does not mean there has to be less of a commitment to other dimensions of their life. People develop a form of reciprocity between paid work and their other roles and identities found in their leisure activities. We experience a constant shifting balance between the dimensions of our lives. Work can provide opportunities for play, deeper involvement in the wider culture and greater social interaction, but it is never without obligation. We have to maintain a balance between the different dimensions of our lives at a given stage of our life course. Social roles both add and subtract from leisure opportunities and constraints. In this approach, leisure is the representation of self by the use of a symbolic and pleasurable encounter with the environment. Leisure is much more than a feeling state, it is embedded in a wide range of activities in all areas of social life. In summary, Kelly is concerned with leisure interaction as a factor in the development of our identity through the life

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course, in which individual people come to construct an identity that they feel comfortable with.

Leisure is central to the maintenance of society and to the development of a social space for the development of intimacy. Kelly (1983) argues that the basis of social solidarity is found in social interaction around the leisure experience. Leisure contributes to social identification and cohesion. Leisure is the social space of friendship, parenting, community interaction and the family. Leisure is not unrelated to the social or environmental context – it is not totally idiosyncratic and esoteric. Kelly would agree with Roberts that leisure is pluralistic in nature and is never fully determined by factors external to the individual. Low income and poverty may restrict the range of leisure activities that are possible, but not all poor people engage in the same set of leisure activities.

Variation in style and content of leisure is related to regularities based upon the life course. Changes in roles are accompanied by shifts in leisure expectations. In contrast to Parker's view of leisure as a leftover period of time, Kelly defines leisure in relation to social networks and changing social roles and responsibilities over time. Periods of unemployment, parenthood, grandparenthood, etc. all impact on our leisure expectations, leisure is seen as something that is complementary to our other social roles. We reconstruct our identity because of the perception of others and, at the same time, how a person chooses to act within their social roles is partly shaped by personal identity and how a person views themselves in the role. Kelly's argument is built on a dialectical relationship between several central concepts:

- *Personal identity* – one's self-definition in a role context.
- *Social identity* – the definition by others of our taking a role.
- *Presentation* – the mode of enacting a role in order to receive a social definition of an intended personal identity.
- *Role identity* – how a role is enacted, a style of behaviour.

Kelly (1981) explains that the philosophical origins of his interactive approach are rooted in the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) who argue that *reality* – which they define as 'a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition' (1966: 13) – is socially constructed. The world has its origins in our thoughts and ideas and is maintained by our thoughts and ideas. Kelly (1981) makes it clear that he rejects the deterministic mode of explanation contained within the Marxian and functionalist perspectives. The leisure experience is not isolated from issues of power or resource allocation, access, exclusion and reward – structural forces related to economic structures can restrict our leisure choices but we still have to take the personal motivation of the individual into account.

For Kelly (1981), almost any activity can be understood as leisure, because it is the *quality* of the pursuit rather than the activity in itself that makes a social action a leisure activity. Leisure is never clearly segmented from our other social roles nor from the ways in which individuals choose to perform their roles. Kelly uses the concept of 'role identity' to link self-conscious action with the social context in which the action takes place. This allows observers to place personal identity within an elated social category and therefore *personal* identity becomes *social* identity.

For Kelly, leisure research should be conducted within the naturalistic setting of 'ordinary life' – whether this is exploring the practices of a children's football team or gambling in a casino, both activities are part of the ongoing construction of everyday life. The everyday minutiae of the day, the insignificant activities that people engage in together, what Berger and Luckmann call the *life world* or the *world of lived experience*, are central to life. There is much more to life and leisure than theme parks and cruises. Everyday life and leisure are organised out of activities such as dinner table talk, family holidays, cleaning the house, messing about, caring for each other and day-dreaming. For Kelly (1997), in our everyday lives, reality is simply taken for granted – we rarely question the construction of reality because it appears both 'normal' and 'self-evident'. This assumed acceptance of normality is what Berger and Luckmann call *the natural attitude*; reality has a quality of *compelling facticity*.

We experience everyday life as an ordered or factual reality. It appears to have a prearranged logical pattern that is independent of what we think and do, but it is not.

For Kelly (1981), the social forces in everyday life, whether we know them or not, help to shape our 'social stock of knowledge' and typifactory schemes that help to shape both our behaviour and the interpretation of our behaviour. The role context people find themselves in, together with the roles we choose to play, are central to our understanding of self. Leisure and the roles we perform within the leisure experience are central to the construction and negotiation of our identity.

We interpret the individuals and the situations we encounter in everyday life by reference to a 'social stock of knowledge' made up of typifactory schemes that provide detailed information about the areas of everyday life that we operate within. We use the typifactory schemes within the stock of knowledge to classify individuals into types, such as 'men', 'girls', 'Chinese', 'disabled', etc. Such typifications also inform us of the most appropriate way of dealing with these different types of people. In addition, we use language to place ourselves in what we consider to be an appropriate category, and we use the social stock of knowledge to define the situation we are in and the limits of our capabilities. The reason why humans involve themselves in these activities, claim Berger and Luckmann, is because in the last analysis, all social reality is uncertain and society is a construction to protect people from insecurity.

The Plasticity of the Leisure Experience

For Berger and Luckmann, people also have a link with the environment through their biology, but they are very clear in stressing that there is no human nature in the sense of a biologically fixed core determining the socio-cultural leisure formations. Berger and Luckmann argue that the human organism is primarily characterised by its ability to change the limits and parameters that are imposed upon it. People are characterised by their plasticity – our individual biography and what we understand to be our personal identity are not wholly individual – they are based upon our subjective meanings acquired through the processes of socialisation. The potentially subjectively meaningful has to be made objectively available to us in order to become meaningful. What is subjectively meaningful to us can only be meaningful if those subjective ideas are interpreted against the typifications that are contained within the social stock of knowledge. When an individual performs a role, such as the role of a disabled person, then that role and the person who performs it are defined by the use of typifications. The role of the disabled person is typified by personal tragedy and loss, and although such roles can be internalised by the people who perform them and can become subjectively real to them, it is important to note that for Berger and Luckmann, this is not an irreversible process. The stock of knowledge, the typifications, the perception of roles and our subjective reflections and internalisations can all be redefined. We can redefine the unity between history and biography. Taylor (2003) attempted to test the relationship between social identity and stereotype theories. Taylor identified twelve leisure activities and used them as a means to assess whether leisure stereotypes exist for women. Stereotypes consisting of between four and eleven words were obtained using the checklist method, with 40 participants contributing to each stereotype (120 participants contributed in total). The stereotypes were found to include characteristics that were both positively and negatively valued and, consequently, they had a range of favourableness ratings. All but one, golf, were positively evaluated images.

In summary, Symbolic Interactionism assumes that what is distinctive about human relationships is our ability to construct social worlds. The theoretical starting point is the autonomous self, defined by intentions, goals, attitudes, values, and beliefs formulated through social interaction. The primary task of the individual is self-definition, for example, 'Who am I?'. Symbolic interactionists argue that leisure stereotypes may exist and could have an impact on our identity. Kelly (1990), for example, assumes that central to leisure research is the notion that people's recreation is a medium for personal enhancement and self-development. The non-obligatory nature of leisure provides a distinctive life space in which people can cultivate their preferred self-definitions. People often buy products not for the functional benefits that they bring, but rather for their symbolic value in terms of enhancing self-image. Products with a distinct brand image act as symbols of how we perceive ourselves. Products such as cars, clothing, fragrance,

home furnishings and a range of leisure products have a high symbolic value to certain segments of society.

Activity

Below is a list of points that are drawn from John R. Kelly's (1987) *Freedom to Be: A New Sociology of Leisure*. What do you feel would be the Marxist, functionalist and feminist views of these points?

The leisure experience has a variety of elements that can be identified and analysed, but at the same time every leisure experience is also a new creation with its own elements.

Consider the following:

- Leisure is the product of a free decision and action.
- Leisure is a process, not fixed but developing and created in its time and place.
- Leisure is situated and constructed in an ever-new context.
- Leisure is production in the sense that the meaning of the leisure is always reproduced in its situation rather than appropriated from some external source.

Postmodernity and Leisure

Postmodernists believe that the world is a risky and uncertain place because of the loss of trust and the loss of meaning in the world, both at the level of individual interactions and at a more global level. However, there is little empirical research into how people cope with this uncertainty, but it is commonly assumed that leisure is central to the strategies that people adopt to cope with uncertainty. The world of work is also very different within the postmodern condition. The postmodern organisation should contain de-demarcated and multi-skilled jobs – unlike the Prussian style bureaucracy as outlined by Weber (1922/1978), the postmodern organisation should be 'de-Prussianised', it should be free of formal rationality, loosely coupled and complexly interactive, it should be a 'collegial formation' with no vertical authority, but with forms of 'networking'. These networks should reflect the new 'cultural and social specialists' needs and cultural capital and allow the specialists to resist control by traditional bureaucracy.

The Weberian form of organisation has rules, structures and procedures that are clearly defined and fully understood. The postmodern organisation represents a shift from the 'punishment-based' hierarchy contained within the Weberian conception of bureaucracy to a 'consent-based' flattened hierarchy.

However we choose to define postmodernism, it is commonly recognised to be a collection of theories about what life is like beyond the far side of modernity. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) invented many of the central ideas of postmodernism. Nietzsche's work is described as anti-foundationalist in nature, in that he wanted to undermine what he considered to be the arbitrary nature of the foundation of knowledge, truth, morality and identity. This tendency often presented itself in slogans such as: 'God is dead'. Nietzsche's

approach provides the foundation for the two central assumptions that underpin postmodernism:

- Epistemological uncertainty – epistemology is a theory of knowledge and it attempts to answer the question: how do we know what we know? When postmodernists use the phrase ‘epistemological uncertainty’, they are suggesting that in the last analysis, we do not know fully what we believe in or why we believe in it.
- Ontological plurality – this is the suggestion of uncertainty as to what reality consists of.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (1983) argues that modernity is built upon grand narratives. These are ‘big stories’ such as socialism or feminism that explain to followers what the world is like and how it works. In the postmodern condition, people have lost faith in such universal belief systems. In the postmodern condition, the meaning of ‘leisure’ is now unclear and postmodernists emphasise the:

- dissolving of boundaries between spheres of life
- de-differentiation of experience
- aestheticisation of everyday life
- anti-hierarchical character of postmodern experience
- opposition to normative value distinctions
- experience of the contingent and uncertain, exhibiting multiple trajectories
- aesthetic experience marked by a sense of intoxication, sensory overload, intensity and disorientation
- experience consumed as a form of distraction with a multiplicity of fragmented, frequently interrupted looks or in dream-like states.

Chris Rojek (1995) argues that ‘traditional’ theories of leisure were born out of, and thus reflect, the rigidities of the production/consumption divide, associated with the Fordist modernity of *homo faber*. Fordism is a form of social organisation based upon a centralised nation state that takes responsibility for the management of the economy and society. This form of society is industrial and the economy is dominated by the manufacture of mass-produced products.

While mass consumption established new leisure habits, the post-Fordist shift to greater diversity has enabled individuals to tailor leisure activities to their own requirements. The multiplication and diversification of television channels, radio stations and weekly magazines aimed at specific market niches rather than mass markets provide examples of this. Lash and Urry (1994) argue that the decline of the package holiday is another example, for the package holiday exemplified Fordist patterns of consumption. The Fordist holiday experience involved a complete package that combined holiday destination, travel, accommodation, catering and entertainment; a standard product, with limited variation in accommodation or resort; advertised through the mass media and sold through travel agent chains at high volume to keep prices low.

They point out that the Thomas Cook company, whose founder created the package holiday, has re-branded itself into a global operation that focuses on providing holiday *information*, so that customers can construct their own packages instead of buying one out of the brochure. They also suggest that travel could be replaced by what they call the ‘post-tourist’ experience of ‘travel by television’.

Leisure under modernity was narrowly conceived as relating primarily to those interests and activities pertaining to recharging the energies of the individual for renewed effort in the workplace. Rojek recommends an alternative direction for leisure theory, associated with the *homo ludens* model in which ‘leisure’ and play are seen as informing and reflecting human needs and motivations. We need to reconceive leisure so that:

- leisure becomes ‘decentred’
- leisure is no longer separated from our other experiences
- leisure is integral to human action, not peripheral and meaningless or ‘inauthentic’ experience
- in postmodern leisure, people are less likely to seek the authentic experience
- leisure becomes an end in itself – not an escape from work
- modern leisure is associated with the life cycle
- postmodernity breaks down barriers in social life
- leisure is central to identity and identity politics
- in modernity, leisure providers are experts, however today people are no longer content to let others organise their leisure for them.

There are a number of contradictions within postmodern writing. Firstly, postmodernists stress the irrational, however the instruments of reason are regularly used within postmodern writing. Secondly, postmodernists reject modern criteria for assessing theory – this raises issues about the criteria for judging the validity of research. Finally, postmodernists reject and abandon truth claims in their own writing.

Activity

Read the passage below and attempt to construct a pluralist, feminist or functionalist ‘reading’ of the film.

Peter Dean (2007) contrasts a Marxian with a postmodern reading of the film *Star Wars*. From a Marxian perspective, the film suggests that the rebel Alliance could be seen as a representation of an oppressed group within a capitalistic bourgeois-dominated political system and that the rebel Alliance, not the Empire, should hold legitimate power and authority in the galaxy. Through its structure and narrative, the film strengthens the class divisions

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in society. The film celebrates the achievement of capitalism by stressing the importance of speed, technology and industrial power. *Star Wars* reinforces the capitalist hegemonic nature of society. However, at the same time, the film gives moral support to the working class in their battle to overcome the Empire.

In contrast, Dean suggests postmodernism is very good at understanding the media-dominated, technological and computerised content of the film. In addition, because the film draws heavily upon a range of conventions from film genres, such as the spaghetti western, epic adventure and a range of other popular cultural forms, Dean suggests that the film is a postmodern pastiche. In the last analysis, a postmodern reading of the film would suggest that *Star Wars* provides moral support to the oppressed, outnumbered and under-resourced rebel Alliance in their struggle against the capitalist hegemonic power of the Empire.

Leisure and Life Politics

Giddens (1994) discusses 'high modernity' under four headings: trust, risk, opaqueness and globalisation. All individuals strive for a 'pure' relationship in Giddens' analysis; this is a relationship based solely upon trust, and cannot be underpinned by any guarantee. In previous ages, it was possible to trust an individual in an intimate relationship, because of their family background or because of their professional background. This guarantee of trust can no longer be given in the 'new times' of 'high' modernity. In terms of politics, the significance of these developments is that within modernity we have moved from 'emancipatory politics' – which is itself a product of modernity – to 'life politics' which is the key factor pushing new social movements to campaign for a form of polity which is on the far side of modernity. Emancipatory politics has two main elements:

- an effort to break free from the shackles of the past
- the overcoming of illegitimate domination, which adversely affects the life chances of individuals.

For Giddens, life politics is a politics, not of life chances, but of lifestyle, and as such it is concerned with breaking down barriers that prevent people from living a life that they feel comfortable with. The disputes and struggles within this form of politics centre on the relationships between individuals and humanity. People should be free to live in a world where tradition and custom should not be used to prevent a person from living as they choose. In the past, life politics disputes would have included the decriminalisation of consenting, same-sex sexual relationships.

Beck (1992) develops the concept of individualisation to explain the problems associated with living a life in a risk society. The concept suggests that each person has a biography, but that biography is now in their own hands – it is

much less likely to be determined by factors outside of their control. Our biographies have become *self-reflexive* or self-produced and our leisure choices are central to the construction of a self that we feel happy with.

For Giddens, the self is reflexive and this reflexive monitoring of self is primarily about the maintenance of a basic security system. In pre-modern times, the self had an 'environment of trust' which was built upon kinship, the local community, religious cosmologies and tradition. This pre-modern environment of trust allowed people to stabilise social ties within a familiar place according to familiar rules. The 'environment of trust' is much less secure and we attempt to stabilise our social ties by personal relationships, notably by attempting to find a pure relationship, a relationship based upon trust.

For Rojek (2001), traditional political economy assumed leisure to be a non-political aspect of our lives, an opportunity to choose a range of activities, to unwind and escape from the stresses and strains of the work process. The concepts of risk, individualisation and life politics, as developed by Giddens and Beck (1994), can be used to redefine the relationship between leisure and the new forms of identity in a world where leisure is no longer dependent upon work. However, as we shall see in the chapters on work and leisure, there is a problematic relationship between the concept of 'life politics' and the concept of 'a leisure society' in which people are liberated from paid employment altogether.

For Rojek (2001), life politics is a product of living in a 'risk society' – in such a society, modes of production and information are still at the centre of issues concerning social control but they cannot always be recognised as belonging to specific nation states, social classes or political elites. People in these societies have a much stronger perception of risk and a much weaker perception of the basic security of self than in pre-modern societies. Within late modernity, there is:

- universalization of risk – particularly from the risk of nuclear accident and ecological destruction, which affect people irrespective of age, race, class or gender
- globalisation of risk – risks are stretched over time and space, decisions made in institutions on the other side of the globe, which we may well be unaware of or unable to influence, can directly affect us
- institutionalisation of risk – institutions have emerged which have 'risk' as their central organising principle, such as financial markets and insurance
- reflexiveness of risk – risk has an element of 'manufactured uncertainty' – the unforeseen consequences of individuals or institutions taking an action can have significant effects, as seen in the unforeseen link between animal feed and CJD.

A number of factors, related to the disappearance of local communities, make the occurrence of risk subjectively feel more severe. This leads to the notion of 'opaqueness', the feeling of uncertainty associated with the lack of any guidelines on how to behave in any given situation, making life have an unpredictable feel to it, and the lack of trust that we have in abstract systems because we know such systems have design faults and that the people who run the systems are likely to make errors.

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Giddens does explain the typical reactions people develop to combat uncertainty and risk:

- Pragmatic acceptance – in which people repress their unease about risk and lack of trust, and adopt a business-as-usual standpoint.
- Sustained optimism – in which people have a belief that the situation will improve because of some factor outside of the control of the individual.
- Cynical pessimism – in which there is a belief that the person should enjoy the here and now.
- Radical opposition – in which the person joins a social movement and actively attempts to bring about a change to their situation.

People in risk societies make use of their leisure experiences to construct a sense of self that they feel content with and which offers them a degree of protection from the uncertainty that is found in other areas of their lives. For Giddens, to be reflexive is to have a *life narrative*; to choose a character, mould our personal identity and decide upon the moral and rational organising principles that we might use to make sense of the reservoir of subjective experience. This narrative is what we use to authenticate ourselves as a self. Individuals, then, have to create and constantly recreate themselves, choosing from lifestyle resources to develop and monitor their chosen life narrative.

In Giddens' analysis, however, individuals have become reflexive in order to compensate for the breaking down of the basic security system of customs and traditions within local communities, brought about by the advancement of late modernity. This is a situation which individuals may find personally troubling, because the protective framework of the local community gave psychological support to individuals and without it they may feel the ontological insecurity of personal meaninglessness and dread.

In summary, *risk* has become an increasingly pervasive concept of human existence in Western societies. According to Beck (1992):

- risk is a central aspect of human subjectivity
- risk is associated with notions of choice, responsibility and blame.

Beck argues that modernity is breaking free from the contours of classical industrial society and we are in the midst of a transition from an industrial society to a risk society. The risk society is not a class society, as both rich and poor are subject to ecological risks. The risk society is global and knows no national boundaries – for example, the effects of Chernobyl. Beck's analyses are based upon a three-stage historical progression from pre-industrial to industrial to risk societies. Each of these three types of society contains risk and hazards, but there are qualitative differences between them in terms of the types of risk encountered. In modern industrial societies, there are industrially produced hazards. The risk society, however, is a society in which 'risks' have become the central principle of social organisation.

In Giddens' analysis, risk society is not postmodernism, rather modernity is increasingly becoming an essentially post-traditional and post-nature form of social order, which brings with it the threat of personal meaninglessness. Moreover, an underlying element of modernity is that as a social form, modernity begins to reflect upon itself. According to Giddens, in traditional cultures, the risk environment was dominated by the hazards of the physical world. Individuals may find this situation *existentially troubling*. Giddens' discussion is similar in a number of important respects to the discussion of risk in Beck's work.

A key element in any fully developed modernity is the single person, cut loose from previously supportive social forms, for example social class or fixed gender roles. Individuals are reflexive for reasons of basic security, and individuals change in order to make themselves feel an enhanced sense of ontological security. In their leisure pursuits, people are reflexive in order to enhance their opportunities to fulfil their desires.

Conclusion

How are we to understand the leisure experience? The leisure experience is more than simply 'free' time. The leisure experience can be therapeutic in nature, involving self-reflection and personal growth. The leisure experience is different from the work experience, in that the leisure experience is a relatively self-determined experience within which we expect to find pleasure and fulfil desire, however in some cases this can be in the form of a deviant or criminal activity. The social science perspectives on leisure suggest that leisure can be functional for both the individual and for the wider society, that it can be pluralistic in nature, that it can support capitalism and other mechanisms of oppression and exploitation. In the next chapter, we shall look in more detail at social class and gender, and further evaluate the theories and research into leisure participation and social class and gender as constraints to leisure participation.

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